



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 82

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# Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Psalm of Asaph*
- The author *Asaph* was probably the great singer and musician of David and Solomon's era (1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:5-7, 25:6)
- Unlike many Psalms, this one is not directed to God
- It speaks of Him and of what is said to rulers
- Some think that this Psalm was probably composed in the time when Jehoshaphat reformed the courts of justice throughout his states; 2 Chronicles 19:6-7, where he uses nearly the same words as in the beginning of this Psalm

# Introduction



- Others say it is written by Asaph, in the times of David, under a spirit of prophecy, and has respect to the times of Christ, when there was a great corruption among the judges and rulers of the Jews
- This Psalm is a model of judgement for the judges of the earth
- It sets forth the responsibility of earthly judges to the Supreme Judge, Whose representatives they are, and from Whom they derive their authority
- In Psalms 50 the nation of Israel is assembled for judgement: here the authorities of the nation who have abused their trust are put upon their trial





# Introduction

- Appeals to maintain the purity of justice are common in the Law
- The Prophets disputed frequently about injustice
- One passage in particular, Isaiah 3:13-15, presents a close parallel, *“The LORD stands up to plead, And stands to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment With the elders of His people And His princes: ‘For you have eaten up the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the faces of the poor?’ Says the Lord GOD of hosts.”*
- The whole point of Psalm 82 is that earthly judges must act with impartiality and true justice, because even judges must stand someday before the Judge



# Introduction

## The Psalm Outline

- A Warning to Corrupt Judges 82:1-2
- God Commands the Unjust Judges 82:3-5
- God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- The Psalm asserts the supreme authority of God over every authority and power
- Asaph gives us the picture of God in the midst of *the mighty*, standing in authority
- He presents an image of God rising to His feet to give His sentence
- He is the Chief and Master, who, from His own point of view, sees all that is done by the great ones of the earth
- When they sit as rulers, He stands over them, ready to deal with them if they alter and distort judgment



# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- Judges shall be judged
- These who have been given such earthly authority on how they rule the land are expected to do so with order and justice
- Those who have such a position answer to God Himself for their rulings
- He is the ultimate judge of the judges; they have their power from Him and are accountable to Him
- God has their hearts in His hands, and their tongues too, and He directs them *wherever He wishes*, Proverbs 21:1

# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- *the congregation of the mighty*, They were the representatives of the divine sovereignty in the administration of justice, Romans 13:1-2,6
- They were, in a sense, gods to other people; but they were not to forget that God stood among them as their God
- That if they were exalted to a high rank in respect to their fellowmen, they were, nevertheless, subject to One God the Almighty
- *the gods*, The rulers and judges of the people, who go by this name *gods*, in Exodus 21:6, and are so called because they are the powers ordained of God, are representatives of Him



# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- The idea of God judging *gods* has led to several suggestions regarding the identity of these *elohim*, these *gods*
- The word *gods* here is *Elohim*, the plural for the generic word for *god* in Hebrew
- *Elohim* is often used to describe the true God, Yahweh
- It is in the plural to describe both the majesty of His person, and to be a hint of the Trinity and Nature of God, being One God in Three Persons
- *Elohim* is sometimes used as the plural of pagan deities, the false gods of the nations

# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- *Elohim* is sometimes used in reference to angelic beings
- The Jewish interpretation tended to see the *gods* as the Israelite community that received the law at Sinai
- As Jesus quotes it in John 10:34-35, “*Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, ‘You are gods’?’*”
- *Elohim* is here best taken as a reference to human judges, who stand in the place of God in their ability to determine the fate of others
- This use of the word *gods* to refer to humans is rare, but it is found elsewhere in the Old Testament

# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- For example, when God sent Moses to Pharaoh, He said, *“See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh”* (Exodus 7:1)
- This simply means that Moses, as the messenger of God, was speaking God’s words and would therefore be God’s representative to *Pharaoh*
- And the meaning might be that Asaph intended to represent God as holding His court surrounded by angels, like an earthly king in the midst of his nobles as we read, *“I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left.”* (1 Kings 22:19)



# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2



- As God calls together this assembly of judges, He did not do it to compliment them
- He did it to confront them for judging *unjustly* and for showing *partiality to the wicked*
- The question, *How long* suggests that the unjust judging has been going on for some time with no end in sight
- God intends to bring it to an end
- *show partiality*, Is a common phrase in the Scriptures to denote favoritism or partiality, Job 34:19; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:17



# A Warning to Corrupt Judges

## 82:1-2

- This is very applicable to the rulers and judges of the Jewish nation in the times of Christ, who had long dealt very unjustly
- Their judgment was wicked concerning the law, which they transgressed by adhering to the traditions of the elders
- This confrontation shows that God Himself is the Judge at the ultimate Supreme Court
- *Selah*, The idea of God calling the judges of the earth into special judgment is worthy of reflection

# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- God's instruction to the judges of this earth is to do their duty in *defending* those who are often treated unjustly
- In Asaph's day the *poor and the fatherless* were often the targets of unfair treatment
- It was the job of the judges to *defend* them and to *do justice to the afflicted and needy*
- The meaning is not that judgment is to be pronounced in their favor because they are poor, or because they are orphans
- This would be to do what they had just been charged with as in itself wrong, showing favor on account of condition or rank, rather than on account of a just claim



# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- The idea is, that *the poor and the fatherless*, having no natural protectors, were likely to be oppressed; that they had none to defend their claims
- Therefore, judges, as if they were their natural protectors, should see that their rights were maintained, *“Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.”* (Isaiah 1:17)
- According to St. Augustine, the talk here is addressed to the Jews who rejected the Lord Christ who came to them like a fatherless, humble, poor, and miserable; whom they intended to kill, saying: “this is the heir come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance” (Matthew 21:38)

# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- One characteristic of the *wicked* is that they prey upon and target *the poor and needy*
- It was the divinely directed duty of judges to *free* the vulnerable from those who oppressed them
- King Jehoshaphat of Judah gave similar wise instruction to judges in 2 Chronicles 19:6-7, “*and said to the judges, ‘Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes.’*”

# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- St. Augustine comments on verse 4 and says, “This is said that it might be known, that in that nation where Christ was born and put to death, those persons were not guiltless of so great a crime, who being so numerous, that, as the Gospel says, the Jews feared them, and therefore dared not lay hands on Christ, afterwards consented, and permitted Him to be slain by the malicious and envious Jewish rulers: yet if they had so willed, they would still have been feared, so that the hands of the wicked would never have prevailed against Him.”



# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- God is still the speaker, and He describes the irredeemable blindness and stubbornness of these unjust judges, before He pronounces sentence on them
- Despite their high standing and higher opinion of themselves, they are often ignorant and easily overestimate their own understanding
- They have no knowledge, neither will they try to understand, though these are the needful qualifications for a judge (1 Kings 3:9)
- It is not an accidental and excusable ignorance, but a willful, by their free will

# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- They not merely judged unjustly, and were not merely partial in the administration of justice (verse 2), but they did not desire to understand their duty, and the true principles on which justice should be administered
- Loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:19)
- When judges walk in the *darkness* of their arrogant pride, the lives of everyday people are uncertain and unstable, as if the ground that should be firm under their feet is shaking

# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- The fundamental bases on which the life of man upon the earth rests, the very principles of morality, are shaken when those whose place it is to administer justice pervert it and deliver injustice instead
- The idea is derived from the stability of the earth, and from the fact that when a building is stable, we assume that it has a solid foundation
- A proper administration of justice is essential to the stability and prosperity of a state
- The very existence of society is threatened when the source of justice is corrupt



# God Commands the Unjust

## Judges 82:3-5



- The Jewish rulers, Pharisees and Sadducees, were reproached by Christ with ignorance of the Scriptures, and the law of God
- They shut their eyes against light and evidence, especially with respect to Christ
- St. Augustine says, “For if even they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory, and those others, if they had known, would never have consented to ask that Barabbas should be freed, and Christ should be crucified. But as the above-mentioned blindness happened in part unto Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles should come in, this blindness of that People having caused the crucifixion of Christ.”



# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- These human judges stood in the place of the *gods* above other people and they had the opportunity and the authority to change people's lives
- It is by God's appointment that they have been invested with divine authority to execute judgement in His name
- They had the greatest honor being delegated gods, carried for a while a little of that authority by which the Lord judges among the sons of men
- The word *gods* is Elohim in Hebrew and in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8-9 the same word *elohim* is translated *judges*



# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- To the words of this verse our Lord appealed (John 10:34-39), when the Jews accused Him of blasphemy because He claimed to be One with God
- They called the judges of old time *gods* and sons of the *Most High* being representatives of God in spite of their unworthiness
- Was it then blasphemy, He asked, for one who had received a special consecration and commission as God's representative, one whose life and work bore witness to that consecration, to call Himself the Son of God?
- On the surface this may seem to be a verbal argument, but the real significance of the quotation lies deeper





# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- The fact that it was possible for men so to represent God as to be called gods or divine was a foreshadowing of the Incarnation
- St. Clement of Alexandria says: “The Word of God became Man (John 1:14) to learn from the Man (the Lord Christ), how can man become god.”
- He is still speaking to Israel’s earthly judges, God reminded them that they *and all of humanity are children of the Most High*
- This is true in the sense that every human being is made in the image of God and can be thought of as the *offspring* of God, “*for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold ...*” (Acts 17:28-29)



# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- When these unjust judges denied protection and justice to the poor, fatherless, afflicted, and needy, the judges treated them as less than fully humans made in the image of God who should be regarded as God's creation, His offspring
- The judges needed to remember this
- Though they bear this high title, it will not exempt them from punishment
- They shall die like common men, *And fall like one of the princes*
- They were like *gods* only in a symbolic sense; they themselves would *die like men* and face judgment before the Judge of all the earth



# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- This fact they have forgotten
- They have been lifted up with pride, as if they were in fact more exalted than other people
- *And fall like one of the princes*, Like Satan, who fell like lightning from heaven, Luke 10:18
- St. Augustine comments on those who lifted up with pride and says, “and through haughtiness of soul, “like one of the princes,” that is, the devil, shall not be exalted, but “shall fall.”
- Asaph closed the Psalm with a plea to God to take His place as the ultimate Judge





# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- The psalmist has watched the trial and condemnation of Israel's judges; and the sight stirs him to appeal to God Himself to assume the office of Judge not only for Israel but for all the world
- The unjust judges of Israel had their own area of authority, but God's authority is over all *the earth*
- This prayer called upon God to do what the earthly judges would not do: judge the earth
- Human judges had failed, so Asaph asked God to take judgment into His own hands
- You are the Judge of the whole earth, to whom all judgment is committed, and who will judge the world in righteousness



# God Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Judges 82:6-8

- Several of the Church fathers have understood this last verse to contain a prophecy of our Lord, the calling of the Gentiles, and the spread of Christianity over the world
- On *Arise, O God*, St. Augustine says, “for the earth swelled high when it crucified Thee: rise from the dead, and judge the earth.”
- He also comments on *inherit* and says, “His inheritance takes place by love, which in that He cultivates by His commands and gracious mercy, He destroys earthly desires.”



# Discussion

- What does God's judgment in this Psalm teach you about God's character?
- To what is the Psalm writer referring when he speaks of the "*in the congregation of the mighty*"?
- To which of the Lord's roles does this Psalm appeal?
- How did Asaph describe the leaders he condemned?





# Discussion

- Why did he refer to darkness?
- For what reason were the “foundations of the earth” shaken?
- What outcome did the psalmist predict for the wicked rulers?
- Why did Asaph ask the Lord to judge the earth?
- What future can wicked leaders expect?